

2011-2012 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 9
December 12, 2011

Science Report:

1. **Penguins:** 76% of the Adélie penguin nests in our study sites currently have chicks, 22% have failed, and 3% are still incubating eggs. 90% of the gentoo penguin nests in our study sites currently have chicks, 9% have failed, and only 1% are still incubating.

"Beach Sweeps" started on Tuesday (12/13), where we walk the beaches & colony areas every evening to resight known-age penguins that didn't breed this season or are just returning to the colony for the first time since fledging.

The first 14 geolocator (GLS) tags were attached to breeding Adélie penguins in one of our study sites on Saturday (12/17) and Sunday (12/18). The GLS tags will stay on for the next year, recording the winter migrations of our Adélie penguins.

Two one-year-old Adélie penguins were seen on Wednesday (12/14) on Copa beach. They are easily distinguished from older Adélie penguins by their white throats (as opposed to the black throats of older penguins), which they will lose when they go through their 14-month molt later this year. Since Adélie penguins don't breed until they are at least three years old, and usually aren't seen until they are at least two years old, sightings of one-year-olds are quite rare.

2. **Skuas:** Many nests were lost at Pt. Thomas and in the Backcountry this week, due to high winds. We currently have 161 active skua territories where pairs are in attendance. Thirty-six percent of these have nests with eggs or chicks and 12% have failed.

Six more geolocator (GLS) tags were attached to breeding brown skuas this week, four at Copa on Wednesday (12/14) & Sunday (12/18), and four at Point Thomas on Sunday (12/18).

The first brown skua chick of the season hatched at Point Thomas on Saturday (12/17).

3. **Giant Petrels:** The giant petrel census of occupied nests was completed at Copa on Wednesday (12/14) and 237 nests were counted. This is similar to the 10-year average in our area (231), indicating a stable giant petrel population.
4. **Seals & Whales:** The seal censuses continue to indicate that we are between the peak of elephant seal activity (which are currently coming ashore to molt) and the onslaught of fur seals, which will begin moving in later this month (also to molt). On Thursday (12/15), the census from Copa to Patelnia resulted in 800 elephant seals (1 weaner



2011-2012 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 9
December 12, 2011

and 799 juvenile/unknowns – almost twice as many as last week's survey), 3 Weddell seals and 2 fur seals. Our Copa to Pt. Thomas census on Saturday (12/17) found 15 elephant seals (15 juvenile/unknowns) and 1 Weddell seal.

Humpback whales have been sighted in the bay several times this week and on Wednesday (12/14), one was observed breaching near the head of the bay.

Weekly Weather:

Once again, the wind blew a nearly constant 20-25 mph from the west this week, with gusts up to 30 mph. Temperatures were a bit warmer, hovering at $\sim 37^{\circ}$ F. On Thursday (12/15), we experienced a short lull in the winds until mid-afternoon, at which time they picked up again. By Friday (12/16), the wind speeds were nearly a constant 45-60 mph winds from the west, with gusts up to 76 mph -- restricting all work outside. The wind finally subsided Saturday (12/10) afternoon and remained relatively calm through Sunday (12/11).

The 2011-12 Copa Field Team
Penny Chilton, Field Team Leader
Brette Soucie
Matt Henschen

